

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SORSA GOVERNEMENT RECONSTITUTED

REF: HELSINKI 583,

1. AFTER MORE THAN A WEEK OF POLITICAL MANEUVERING, IN WHICH
THE UNAPPEALING PROSPECT OF EARLY ELECTIONS FORCED THE PARTIES
DIFFICULT COMPROMISES ON A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, FINLAND'S GOVERNMENT
FORMATION TALKS (REFTEL) REACHED A BIZARRE CONCLUSION (EVEN FOR FINLAND)
LATE MARCH 1 WITH THE DECISION BY THE SORSA GOVERNMENT TO WITHDRAW
IT RESIGNATION. THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE IN OFFICE MINUS THE
SWEDISH PEOPLE'S PARTY (RKP), WHICH COULD NOT GO ALONG WITH THE
DRAFT PROGRAM HAMMERED OUT BY THE OTHER FOUR MEMBERS OF THE COALITION
NEW ELECTIONS WERE THUS AVOIDED AT THE LAST MOMENT ALTHOUGH THE
GOVERNMENT CONTINUES ON AN EXTREMELY FRAGILE FOOTING.

2. THE COMPOSITION OF THE CABINET IS ONLY SLIGHTLY CHANGED:
THE RKP EDUCATION PORTFOLIO HELD BY KRISTIAN GESTRIN WENT TO JAAKKO
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ITALA OF THE LIBERAL PEOPLE'S PARTY (LKP) WHO HELD THE SAME POST IN
1970-71. THE LIBERALS ALSO KEPT THEIR OTHER CABINET SEAT, THE JUSTICE
MINISTRY, BUT WITH A NEW MINISTER - PAAVO NIKULA, WHO HAS BEEN A CIVIL
SERVANT WITHIN THE MINISTRY. NIKULA IS REGARDED AS LESS ACTIVE
IN PARTY POLITICS THAN FELLOW LIBERAL TUURE SALO, WHO WAS

FORCED TO RESIGN THE POSITION TO SATISFY SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CONCERNS THAT THE LIBERALS NOT HAVE TWO ACTIVE POLITICIANS IN THE CABINET. A SIMILAR CONCERN FOR SENSITIVITIES AMONG THE COALITION MEMBERS PRECLUDED ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN TRADE, AND THE PARTY ALIGNMENT OF THE CABINET THUS REMAINED EIGHT FOR THE NON-LEFT AND SEVEN FOR THE LEFTIST PARTIES PLUS ONE INDEPENDENT.

3. THE NEW PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVERNMENT CONTAINS A COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE EFFORTS AIMED AT STIMULATING ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION. HOWEVER, DETAILS HAVE NOT BEEN MADE AVAILABLE AND REPORTEDLY THE PARTIES ONLY REACHED AGREEMENT BY LEAVING SEVERAL KEY ASPECTS UNRESOLVED. RELUCTANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE CENTER AND LIBERAL PARTIES TO ACCEPT THE PROGRAM WAS SO GREAT THAT THEIR PARTY COUNCILS WERE OBLIGED TO TAKE VOTES AND APPROVAL WAS FAR FROM UNANIMOUS.

4. THE RKP'S REASON FOR LEAVING THE GOVERNMENT WAS ITS UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT A PROPOSAL AGREED TO BY THE OTHER PARTIES FOR AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION TO REQUIRE ONLY SIMPLE MAJORITIES ON ECONOMIC POWERS ACTS. FEARFUL OF ESTABLISHING A PRECEDENT FOR MODIFYING THE CONSTITUTION, THE RKP WANTED TO WAIT AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS TO CARRY OUT THIS REFORM. BY DISSOCIATING ITSELF FROM THE PROPOSAL, IT HOPES TO DISCOURAGE THE GOVERNMENT FROM TAKING ACTION. MOVEMENT OF THE SMALL RKP INTO OPPOSITION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TEN YEARS STILL LEAVES THE GOVERNMENT WITH AMPLE PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT.
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PORT,
AT LEAST ON PAPER, BUT MAY HAVE SOME EFFECT ON THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES BOTH IN CARRYING OUT THEIR PROGRAM AND IN APPROACHING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.

5. COMMENT: IN ADDITION TO SEVERAL UNRESOLVED ISSUES CONCERNING GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICY, LABOR NEGOTIATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF THE LAST DEVALUATION HAVE STILL TO BE UNDERTAKEN. MOREOVER, THE FOUR-PARTY GOVERNMENT MUST FACE THESE DIFFICULT ISSUES IN AN INCREASINGLY POLITICIZED CLIMATE ENGENDERED BY THE APPROACHING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (TO BE HELD NO LATER THAN NEXT MARCH). UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, PROSPECTS FOR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION WITHIN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT ARE NOT PROMISING. FURTHER ANALYSIS AND BIOGRAPHIC DATA ON NEW CABINET MINISTERS WILL FOLLOW.

RIDGWAY

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